PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

Resonance and Absence: A text world analysis of Tuonela by Philip Gross.

Nigel McLoughlin

Introduction

In the essay that follows I will use a theoretical framework based on Text World Theory (Werth 1999; Gavins 2007) and Stockwell's (2009; 2011) model of literary resonance to analyse the poem 'Tuonela' by Philip Gross (2013, 61-63). In the course of the analysis I will examine how this poem achieves its subtle and liminal effects, the ways in which it thematically explores the idea that the world of the dead can be made co-present and accessible, and how the poem engenders positivity in the face of loss, even as the language is filled with negation. This essay also serves as an example of how cognitive poetic tools may be used to make such subtle techniques explicit for student writers, and offer them a rigorous means to discuss their attempts to apply them in their own art.

Analytical Framework

The cognitive poetic framework I have chosen to apply is drawn from Text World Theory. There are two well-known versions of this theory, the earlier of which was developed by Paul Werth over two decades and published in its full form in his posthumous monograph *Text Worlds: Representing Textual Space in Discourse* in 1999. The later version was developed from Werth's original by Joanna Gavins and published in her monograph from 2007: *Text World Theory: An Introduction.*

Text World Theory outlines three basic types of world that we encounter as we take part in a discourse act. The first of these is the discourse world, which is the world within which the discourse takes place. This might be a conversation between two people, where both participants share the same place and time, or as in the case of literature, a split discourse world where the author and reader are separated in time and space. The

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second basic type of world is the text world. The text world is the world as described by the subject matter of the discourse. So to give an example, in a novel the author may tell a story about 1920s New York gangsters, and the reader reconstructs that world as it is described in the text. In the discourse world, the reader may be drinking tea at home in 2018, the author may have written the story in 2015, but the text world is constructed from the details of the text that evoke 1920s New York. These details are what Werth (1999, 180) calls 'world-building elements': information related to time, place, persons, objects, and 'function advancing propositions' (Werth 1999, 191), information that moves the plot along, develops characters, or descriptions of places and events etc.

The third type of world that Werth described is the sub-worlds. These are worlds that are separate from the discourse world, and from the main text world, but are formed from what he called departures. These sub-worlds are of three types: deictic, attitudinal, or epistemic (Werth 1999, 213). These can arise from the discourse world, for example if I'm reading a detective novel, half way through I might believe I know who is guilty. In that case this is a belief entertained by a participant in the discourse. Alternatively, there may be a belief expressed by a character in the novel that one of the other characters is guilty. This belief originates in the text world.

Deictic departures most commonly relate to movements in space or time, for example a textual movement to describe happenings in a different plot strand in a different location or a flashback to events of an earlier time in the world of the text, but they also occur where direct speech is used so that the events of the text are being filtered through a different narratorial viewpoint. Attitudinal departures signal sub-worlds that contain the purposes, beliefs or thoughts of the originating entity, as in our examples above about beliefs. Epistemic departures signal sub-worlds that contain what might happen, what could potentially happen, or what might happen if certain conditions are

fulfilled. For example, if I finish this section before the end of the afternoon, I will go to the pub after dinner. This may or may not happen, but it projects a hypothetical world where it might.

It is at this level where the main differences between Gavins' and Werth's versions occur. Gavins removed the hierarchical aspect of Werth's sub-worlds preferring to see them as either 'world-switches' (2007, 47), in relation to the deictic departures, and 'modal worlds' for worlds which arise from attitudinal and epistemic departures. She identifies three types of modal world which are derived from three different types of modality in language (following the classification of Simpson 1993). These are boulomaic, deontic, and epistemic modal worlds. Boulomaic modal worlds (Gavins 2007, 94) arise from a character (or discourse participant) indicating desires, aspirations and wishes; deontic modal worlds (2007, 99) arise from compulsions or duties that are expressed; and epistemic modal worlds (2007, 110) arise from expressions of possibility, hypotheticality, and expressions that indicate perception or understanding (2007, 114-115).

Werth and Gavins also differ in terms of their treatment of negation. Negation is classified by Givón (1993, 202) into three types: syntactic negation which arises from the use of a negative particle such as 'no', 'never' or 'not'; morphological negation which arises through the use of words containing a negative prefix or affix, such as 'dis-', 'un-' or '-less'; and inherent negation where the word has a meaning which is generally construed as negative, such as 'dead', 'fail' or 'deserted'. In Gavins' version of Text World Theory each of the world types can have negative versions that might contain what a character won't do, shouldn't do, doesn't believe etc. Werth treats negation as being a form of epistemic sub-world that changes the definition of the world through some parameter of the world suffering deletion (1999, 252) or as 'negative accommodation' where something is

mentioned with the specific purpose of negating it (1999, 253-54). Clark and Clark (1977, 110) assert that the negative is conceptualized by first calling to mind the positive and then explicitly negating it: so in order to think of 'no traffic' one must first call to mind the traffic, and this means that two conflicting conceptual representations are created (Hidalgo Downing 2002, 123, 127). Werth and Gavins differ also on the concept of 'toggling' which Werth uses to describe switching between different locations in the text (1999, 224-225), while Gavins develops and expands this term to include two worlds, one of which is part of the base text word, being processed simultaneously, through metaphoric association (Gavins 2007, 148-153) but this might be further expanded to include the toggling effect of switching between versions of text worlds formed through negation.

Over a number of previous articles and chapters (see McLoughlin 2013; 2104; 2016a; 2016b) I have combined Text World Theory with ideas outlined by Peter Stockwell (2009; 2011) on the operation of attentional processes and how these may contribute to literary resonance. Drawing on previous work on the gestalt perception of figures and gaps in the work of Carstensen (2007), Stockwell lists a number of conceptual effects which can operate as figures that capture the attention in texts. Among the examples he offers are agency, newness, brightness, largeness, aesthetic distance from the norm, and empathetic recognisability (2009, 31). He further asserts that attentional salience varies along an empathetic continuum from active human speaker, through bystanders, animals, objects, and abstractions (2009, 30). Gaps too can be the focus of attention, a kind of negative figure recognizable through outline, and Stockwell draws an equivalence between these and lacunae in texts (2011, 43).

A number of processes can occur with relation to attention. It may be maintained; we may carry out an attentional zoom, where we focus on a particular part of the figure;

or attention may shift or move attention to other figures. In other cases our attention can be occluded by the appearance in the foreground of another salient object, which causes the originally attended figure to be backgrounded, and if attention is occluded for a period of time, the original figure may decay from attention. In doing so, such a figure may leave a conceptual resonance, which Stockwell calls 'felt absence' (2011, 43).

Stockwell's model of literary resonance and Text World Theory can act in concert to provide a robust framework which is capable of tracking conceptual movements within and between the text worlds constructed by the text, capturing the fluid conceptual movements as text worlds are created, attended, and replaced in attention by other text worlds. Often text worlds are reactivated in attention several times over a text, and in some cases these worlds continue to resonate as they decay. The attentional tracking aspect of Stockwell's model adds a dynamic aspect to the structural rigour of Text World Theory.

I have chosen to analyse Philip Gross' poem Tuonela (which is presented in full for ease of reference in the appendix), because it is a haunting and subtle poem that I've admired since I first read it. It was also one of those poems where it was difficult to articulate just what it was doing to me and how. The following section begins with a detailed analysis of the worlds as they are formed in the text, and then broadens out to examine how the text world structure and attentional processes involved work to support the thematic ideas in the poem, and how they create a sense of the poem as a liminal space.

Analysis

Tuonela is subtitled 'after Sibelius' who wrote the tone poem 'The swan of Tuonela' as part of a larger work drawing on Finnish mythology. Tuonela itself is the underworld or realm of the dead in Finnish and Estonian mythology, where it is

envisioned as an island in a lake or river that must be crossed to reach it. The poem starts with the word 'No' which forms part of an initial contradiction 'No, it's not'. This is initially anaphorically ambiguous, in that the 'it' that 'is not' cannot immediately be resolved. We resolve it as 'the world' or 'the state of affairs' when we encounter 'as I thought'.

We are invited to create a negative world, which is formed in opposition to the conditions of what the speaker thought, and expressed in an epistemic modal world. In the main text world we may infer that the conditions thought to exist in the epistemic modal world do not hold. The negated world we create is made up from conditions that we are told, a priori, do not exist. This invites us to create a world which excludes that set of conditions, but because there are several potential alternatives that all exclude the negated conditions, the positive world, which represents the true state of affairs has several possible versions. The conditions present in the negative epistemic world are that 'we move and it is still' – here the 'it' refers to the grey water, which is given the estranging quality of being harder than the granite which surrounds it, thereby implying ice. In other words, the observer moves and the water or ice in the valley does not.

In the version of the world which excludes this relationship, and which forms the main initial text world, there are several relationships that might be happening: 'we' may be still and the water moving, 'we' and the water may both be moving, or 'we' and the water may both be still. The initial worlds constructed are rather unstable, in that they are created from what is not, and what was thought to be, without really being specific as to what is. There is no positive statement which confirms the true relationship conditions in the 'actual' text world, only an assertion of what they are not. This makes a significant attentional figure of the negated text world, and negation as a trope in the poem, since we are forced to attend very carefully to it in order to deduce what the 'real' conditions might be.

Our attention is drawn to what would normally be background scenery, the lake, the granite backdrop of the valley, before the figure of a swan is focused upon. This is an effect which may be understood as a zoom out from the lake to a wider 'shot' of the surrounding valley, and then a zoom in to focus on the swan on the lake. This swan, we are told has completed the action of gliding but has done so imperceptibly. The morphological negation keeps the negative polarity of expression active as an attractor, while also reversing the expectation that the movement of the swan is perceptible. In this world one can see the change in position once it has occurred, but not the process by which the change is achieved.

The verb 'seemed' creates another epistemic modal world, which also implies that the negative is true in the main text world, for seeming implies that the conditions specified in the epistemic world of perception or 'seeming world' are not fulfilled in the main world. The swan is not 'a pale-etched shape in glass with dark behind it', but it clearly possesses some of the ghostly qualities of that image in the main world, making the attentionally salient figure of the swan difficult to accurately perceive. The observer is 'unnerved'. Again the use of the morphologically negative foregrounds that as a trope in the poem, while the direct contradiction of what is thought, and the implied negation of what only 'seems' creates a main world constructed entirely in negative relation to those conditions. Perhaps that is what is unnerving for the observer, and to an extent to the reader. We expect our stable world to be constructed in the positive. We usually describe our world through positive declarative statements, which offer 'facts' about the world that will allow us to construct a stable mental representation of the state of affairs they describe. The overall sense is that in this world, all is not as it might seem, or as the observer might think.

The deictic shift marked by 'now' in the first line of stanza three, also implies that the initial text world is a past world, perhaps earlier in the same train journey, before the train reached the city. But the switch also evokes the sense that the 'before state' and the 'after state' have been rendered visible, but the process, the movement between the two states is left invisible, just as the movement of the swan in the previous stanza has been presented. This reactivates the world of the lake and the swan in attention making it co-active with the world of the train. We may think of this in terms of the liminal (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1969), in the sense that the states either side of the limen are rendered visible to us, but the liminal processes which are involved in crossing the line between these states is being obscured.

This present world of the text is late October, morning rush-hour, Western Avenue of an unnamed city. It includes the inherently negative terms 'stasis' and 'late', but is otherwise framed with positive statements. The use of rhetorical devices such as the chiasmus of 'light enough...enough dark' and the oxymoron 'bright-dim' draw attention to the crossing points between the positive and negative in the inherent negations contained there, and words with more positive connotations connected to them. The bright-dim oxymoron is also presented as part of an image that connects the outer world of traffic on Western Avenue, with the internal world of neuronal 'traffic'. Furthermore there is an equation being drawn between this world and the shadow-like under-world of Tuonela. This is reinforced by the simile which draws the comparison between music and its mutability in terms of version, depending on conductor or performer, with the mutability of the internal representation of self and world in the internal traffic of the neurons.

The devices used act as significant attractors, using their linguistic form to draw attention to the ideas expressed: there is a very near anadiplosis, because 'same shore,

same score', vary only in a single phoneme group 'sc'/'sh' and there is a repetition of same again in 'same / notes'. This repetition and rhyme draws attention to the relation being implied between the lake world and the musical representation of it; different representations being just different winds across the same water.

Over the course of stanzas five and six, the world of the train, and rush-hour are occluded, through a retreat into an internal world, which can be realised by shutting out the external world in various ways, through head-phones or closed eyes, to imagine the world evoked by the music. Throughout these two stanzas inherent negation builds again – 'cry', 'late', 'dark', 'night', and the syntactically negative 'never' and 'no stars' precede a deictic shift to 'that lake', at the start of stanza seven, which invites us to attentionally reactivate the initial world of the lake from the first two stanzas.

There are two epistemic modal worlds which emerge from the lake world, in the first, there is a hypothetical world where the glints on the waters might be reflections of 'us' which leads to a further hypothetical world, where the observer might hold still enough to observe 'the moment' where 'endless / movement finally amounts to stillness'. This moment is implied to be 'Tuonela' by the final colon, before the sense changes after the line break. The negative is foregrounded again in 'Tuonela / isn't elsewhere, it's not even *after.*' – This attaches the deictic properties of 'here', because we infer that if something is not elsewhere, then it must be 'here' as all other locations are excluded, and 'past and/or now' because if it is not after, then the event must either be occurring now, or have occurred in the past. So we infer the property, or set of properties, in this case world building elements that may be possible, from what we are told are not, and we apply what we infer to the world of Tuonela, again constructing properties of that world, or versions of it, out of what is not excluded by the negative propositions. The last line of stanza eight opens an epistemic modal world where the speaker 'could call on the dead',

but call on them 'here' in the main text world, thereby evoking the possibility that the realm of the dead might be made present in the main text world.

The following stanza is ambiguous – the request to 'bear me out' might be interpreted as a request to the reader to consider the possibility. This is reinforced by the following 'yes, you' as if there was imagined surprise in the addressee – perhaps the reader's imagined surprise at being directly addressed. Or it might be a request to the dead, who have 'stepped out of the singular' of themselves to become the collective 'dead'; or a member of the dead, who has stepped out of themselves, joined the dead, but still resists the plural nature of 'the dead' by being remembered as the person they were. The line which follows picks up on this duality. The speaker 'can't focus on you or on you' – which might be interpreted as being unable to focus on you (living) or on you (dead). This creates an interesting twinning of negative worlds where the entity that cannot be focused on is different in each, but which raises both in attention.

The tenth stanza neatly sums up the feeling engendered by the poem in the reader. Again the morphological negations 'unsettlement', and 'tideless', and 'without', which is morphologically negative in form but functions as a syntactic negation, are used as attractors to draw attention to the liminal nature of the worlds in the poem. The 'tideless water' refocuses attention back to the world of Tuonela, but we are not sure on which shore we stand. The following stanza switches world again to the train station at which the speaker of the poem waits, but even here we are in a liminal space, a space of change, where 'windows flicker between this / and an opposite platform' which neatly mirrors the Tuonela world with its two shores, maintaining that world in attention through the associative resemblance.

The anaphora 'now / a crowd, now empty' foregrounds the change of state that shows beginning and end position, but the transition is not perceived. This evokes the 'having glided' of the swan in stanza two. This is followed by the creation of another epistemic world, the world that Tuonela 'was meant to be' again doubled by the use of anaphora. But what was meant to be is not what is, so the negative of that meant world, represents what Tuonela is: a world which is not grey, which has colour, and is not cold or numb. It is not 'between / now and never'. This is reinforced by the positive statement 'Tuonela is here'. The realm of the dead is fully present, and represents the means of holding those things that matter most to us. It is here and now and internal, a world within our world that we can access by simply changing focus from the external to the world of the mind. This can be viewed as a kind of conceptual toggle. The world of Tuonela is invisible, but implied, like the imperceptible motion of the swan, shown as having moved, or in the way that the station is presented as being full and being empty implies a process of people leaving.

The final stanza takes this implication to another conclusion, again evoking the swan from the Tuonela world makes that world again co-present with the speaker's own in the reader's attention, but this time the gaze is reversed. We are invited to see the realm of the dead as co-present. The gaze may be returned, and the implied eye is that of the swan, returning our gaze as we stand on the shore, perhaps being made to feel a sense of our own mortality, and life's liminality as a bright instant outside of, but shadowed by, Tuonela.

This feeling of being between worlds, and of being at the crossing point between these worlds, creates a strong sense of liminality. We find ourselves in transition, the train transits between the countryside and the city; the speaker transits between trains; transits between internal and external realities; and the world of Tuonela, shadows the

real world, and is co-present with it. The poem epitomizes a transitional stage, we are shown states of before and after, the swan, and the swan having moved; the station crowded, the station empty. The process of transition is invisible, indirectly evoked through negation, creating a felt absence in the poem.

The poem foregrounds the use of negation as a way of creating negative worlds, but also as a means of constructing worlds which are contrary to the negative conditions expressed. This duality is mirrored through the use of rhetorical figures which suggest crossing and doubling at various points through the poem; through repeated switches between worlds, and the toggling of attention between them, in order to create a co-presence, and a liminal space within the poem.

Conclusion

In its various evocations of negative and positive worlds, and through its focus on versions of worlds that exist either side of boundaries and processes, the poem makes an attentional figure of the liminal by creating a negative figure, which resonates in attention throughout the poem. This makes it a 'felt absence'. The liminal process is never directly shown, it is alluded to by its edges, which are defined by the worlds that exist either side of the process occurring. The thematic connection between the land of the dead, and the land of the living, and the toggling between these worlds, also affords the reading that the process being alluded to, but not mentioned, is the process of dying. The boundary between life and death is obscured, and by extention the process of physical death is also removed from the gaze and from explanation. It is replaced by a different boundary and a different resonant process through the juxtaposition between the two worlds and the idea that these two worlds can be made co-present, and therefore that the dead are with us, and accessible through an internal process of movement.

As demonstrated by this analysis, Text World Theory, particularly when augmented by ideas from Stockwell's model of literary resonance, offers a powerful analytical tool which can tease out very subtle effects in poems (and other texts). These types of tool, I believe, offer several advantages to the creative writer, as well as the critic. Firstly, they make explicit features of the language that can engender certain effects: in our example here, negation and modality are being used to create worlds which outline resonant gaps in what is being said, or cannot be said. This is a technique that students can use in their own writing. The analytical tools make it explicit for them and offers a way of talking about such techniques in relation to their art.

Secondly, at a more macro level, it shows how texts can be structured with worlds being represented which offer metaphoric relationships or oppositional relationships that can be attentionally reactivated for the purpose of bring both together in the reader's mind. Again, this type of analysis makes the mechanics of the technique explicit, so that students can see it in action. They can then attempt to apply it. The fact that they have been offered a set of analytical tools, and a vocabulary to go with them, means that they will be able to recognize and describe similar techniques in the work of others and describe their intended use of these techniques in exegeses.

Lastly, it offers a set of tools to examine exemplar texts with a view to answering questions such as how does this text do what it does to me? How is the meaning being made? These 'how' questions in relation to effect and meaning construction are crucial to creative writers, and the more tools they have to answer them the better. Cognitive stylistics lends itself to a writerly way of analyzing texts that focuses on what the writer can learn about making really good texts, how those texts do what they do to us as readers, and offer ways of explicitly considering how those effects might be created in new texts in a rigorous and principled way.

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